

REPORT OF EFFICIENCY COMMITTEE

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REPORT OF EFFICIENCY COMMITTEE

BY EDWARD E. ALLEN

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In its first report your Committee presented a resume, based on answers to a questionnaire sent to all our schools. Its disclosures and generalizations were illuminating, the credit for which was the collective honesty and naivete of the returns themselves. It was read before this body at Baltimore, printed both in the "Outlook for the Blind", (vol. 14, No. 2), and in the proceedings of the Association, and doubtless was perused in private, if not in the small public of teachers' meeting. To what extent it was then laid aside and its lessons forgotten your Committee does not know. Perhaps, indeed, some people found it interesting because almost funny, while others possibly deemed its self-revelations matters to be ashamed of. At any rate, your Committee has heard very little from it, which fact may be interpreted either as complimentary or as disbelief tempered and restrained by charity for the other fellow.

However that may be, your Committee has been continued and urged to seek and find the most successful teaching methods and plans of each of our many schools, for each excels in something, to bring these methods to general attention and trial and gradually, with those that survive this test, to build up a manual. This we have begun to do. We have begged each superintendent to obtain from his best teachers a write-up of their courses, giving both theory and practice.

The responses, while not general, have been generous from three or four schools. These have shown not only that the superintendents know a good teacher when they have him, but also that they are more than willing to share some of the benefits with others. It is interesting to note that one of these returns treats of "The Application of Public School Music to

Classes in Schools for the Blind"; that another outlines a complete theoretical and practical course in domestic science; and that still another sees in Physical Training our great fundamental need and proceeds to show how to meet it. One school has, with much labor, written out a full and complete syllabus of its actual course in arithmetic from the first to the ninth grade inclusive. This, which fills many typewritten pages, has been submitted to four schools for practical trial,—not to more because we did not have more copies. For schools that wish to make arithmetic a basic study, giving a daily period to it throughout nine years, this detailed comprehensive outline is commended as a proper one to imitate. To others—and there are others—including the "arithmetically reflective citizens," it is still well worth careful scrutiny in order to see how much it may be cut down without elemental loss. Of this as of the other model papers your Committee needs to know which schools will definitely try it out; then we can tell how many to multigraph.

This paper on daily arithmetic not only tells the how, but describes the what and the wherewithal to work with. For those who prefer not to go according to a standardized textbook however excellent, but to give an experienced teacher of seeing children suggestions for adapting her methods to the blind, there is another and shorter paper which confines itself mainly to answering the two questions: How, and what, should we stress most in arithmetic? This also covers all the years of number study but discretely omits unessentials while it waits on growth.

A paper on "Teaching Geometry in Schools for the Blind," is supplied by a teacher-superintendent who evidently loves his subject. Another

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teacher of mathematics makes this comment on it: "Am following this excellent paper. It starts out by showing how to create an interest through concrete examples; then it stresses the fundamentals; then deals thoroughly and in detail with the first propositions. As soon as there is sufficient to build on, the 'why' is introduced and the pupil required to give his why for each step taken; from which requirement logical reasoning is fostered and the why habit implanted. Original propositions are brought in to develop free thinking and to discover those who rely on rote memory, a strong inclination of many blind pupils." And the critic ends by saying: "Geometry may seem useless and far away from the business of making a living—the acute problem of the blind. Yet the thought training it stimulates, is so valuable and the application of the subject so general that no mentally capable blind youth can afford to neglect studying it."

No course in algebra has been sent in. But one in Latin has been, which treats the subject from the point of view of English. It might well be termed Practical Latin, or Latin as a Practical Subject. It opens thus: "The question is often raised, 'Why study Latin?' Latin is a dead language; let us devote our time to practical subjects, and when a foreign language is studied let it be a live modern one. A counter question might well be asked: 'Is Latin either a dead language or a foreign language to us English-speaking people? Nearly one-half the words of our mother tongue are Latin. If, therefore, we are ignorant of Latin our knowledge of English is sadly crippled. The study of Latin is indeed a practical one, and as useful as the most uncompromising utilitarian can desire. We should be able to use our native speech with clearness, precision and discrimination, and no subject, apart from English itself, will give us as good a foundation as Latin. How then can we neglect the language

which gives us one-half of our vocabulary?" The writer of the paper, after admitting that too many pupils take up the study of Latin with a bad grace, do as little as possible in it, and drop it as soon as they can, remarks: "We teachers may as well acknowledge that if our pupils are not interested in a subject the fault must be our own; we must ourselves lack interest and belief in it and therefore do not present it interestingly." Doubtless she feels that Latin would best not be attempted by a teacher who disbelieves in it.

Now, the writer of the paper, who is principal of her department, requires Latin in the first year of her high school, which is sufficient to show its practicality, but she offers it thereafter as an elective. And please observe this: she states that fully one-half of her boys always elect to go on with it.

Why Latin may be a practical subject and how it may be made to commend itself as such to high school pupils the paper shows. It is strongly commended to your consideration.

That English is the most practical school subject of all is obvious. Two papers have been submitted, one on Teaching English in the Grades, the other on The Teaching of Literature to the Blind,—both being very suggestive. In the first the author describes her effort to treat language as a live subject based on child life and interests. She follows for fundamental text a work whose plates have been embossed by one member of the Efficiency Committee, Driggs' "Live Language Lessons," probably the most stimulative and worthwhile textbook which has yet been put into our Braille. She touches upon the whole field and ends with a bibliography which she has found serviceable.

The paper,—that on teaching literature,—states that the result of the study of literature should be twofold: first, it should develop the ability to speak and write simply and effectively; and second, it should awaken an

appreciation of literary productions as a source of real and neverfailing enjoyment, both as study and as pastime. Then it proceeds to show how to correlate interpretation and composition. The minds of the seeing students of literature, she reminds us, because of more extended opportunities, are stored with stock allusions which the blind either lack or are unable to look up. And since things understandable make neither pleasant nor instructive reading, and so tend to make reading itself not a resource but a task, she would bid teachers of the blind to be ever conscious of these limitations and to stimulate the pupils to ask thoughtful questions regarding reference and interpretations.

This stimulation seems to your Committee fundamentally important. We would dwell upon it. If the personality of the teacher is one of the two legs on which a school stands, the common general information of the pupils is the other. How are we going to impart this information? Superintendent Frank H. Hall, the educator to whom we owe the Braille-writer and the stereotype maker, said at the World's Congress of Educators of the Blind Auxiliary in Chicago: "The effect of blindness is to diminish the sum total of perception, perhaps 50, 75 or even 80 per cent. So little time of the blind child is occupied in the exercise of the perceptive faculties that he has much more time than his seeing companions for the exercise of conceptive powers, for reflection, comparison, reasoning, and for the exercise of memory. He therefore becomes strong where the seeing child is apt to be weak, but weak where the seeing child is strong; namely, in knowledge of the relation of material things. Now, since sense perception is the groundwork of our thinking, the child that is born blind, without the assistance of intelligent training, will always work upon a narrow base. Indeed, unintelligent training in a school for the blind may make the base narrower than it otherwise would be."

One member of your Committee boasts having a pretty complete museum of specimens for object teaching and study, and he sees classes of his younger pupils being taught by means of them practically every day. Recently, however, he stopped two of his full-fledged graduates, and then the first five of his upper school girls who happened along, with the question: "How many legs has a snake?" And would you believe it?—not one of the seven was sure. There are snake skins and even stuffed snakes in his museum, but these girls had somehow escaped object study. They had also failed to grasp the meaning of what he had read aloud to them shortly before in Chapel and what they must have read to themselves in Genesis, viz.: that God had condemned the snake to proceed upon its belly. What is this but slovenly mental habit? There is no school for the blind in Germany and Austria where escape from object lessons would have been possible; the Government says to the director, "Omit Anschauungsunterricht and be sure your sin will find you out"; and largely for that reason the elementary training of the blind of those countries is so fine. How do we Americans supply this fundamental need? We don't supply it; the questionnaire of two years ago revealed this fact. Often the wide-awake teacher does what she can,—collecting herself and through friends many common objects. She interests the institution janitor or the gardener to bring her things—bolts and threaded nuts, screws and a rattail file; or a dead rat, a toad, tadpole, bird, worm and beetle, and suchlike common things. Small rare perishable specimens she preserves in alcohol, to be brought out and handled each year as needed for the reading lesson. She talks about them and otherwise develops mental concepts of them. The children model them in clay or plasticine, and so fix their shape and size in mind. And they should so fix them, for when will they ever "see" them again? Such a live

this pupil

teacher will gradually build up a caseful of objects, many of them contributed by themselves, some by local manufacturers, some by local museums of Natural History. But where the teacher is not alert or resourceful, her children, who naturally forage comparatively little, remain so ignorant of this and that and the other, that they don't realize they don't know about them. They hear but do not understand. What worse habit in reading can they form? Giving our children a reading lesson under such circumstances is as unscientific as "reading a treatise on botany to a flower bed to make the plants grow."

Perhaps most schools for the blind expect object study to be picked up when pursuing geography. It was evidently so expected of the teacher who has contributed the article on Suggested Ways and Means of Imparting Geography to Blind Children. Doubtless she had read Mr. Burritt's statistical study on the physical and mental condition of some 275 new pupils of the Overbrook school and come to comprehend the extreme poverty of ideas of all such children who have had "wisdom at one entrance quite shut out." At any rate she must have found or collected a lot of material to work with, or she couldn't have progressed at all.

The way to open the institution pocketbook for this fundamental teaching material is for you teachers to show your superintendent how much you have already gathered for nothing, how much there is which you have been unable to beg, buy or steal, and to implore him for more. Tell him, for example, that your pupils ought to understand all about the human eyeball and that you know of a firm in Chicago which supplies a fine, large, dissectible model of one for \$10. Have no qualms about spending all you can get, for all these things will become the bricks with which you can have some chance of building well the house of education, the house which will be denied your children un-

less you come to their rescue before it is too late. The statement that children learn less in school than out of it hardly applies to the blind. It should be a privilege of the coming Foundation for the Blind to lend a hand here either by giving collections or sending them around just as traveling libraries are sent. The National Institute for the Blind in London is doing just this sort of thing for Great Britain.

The child must be led to observe everything accurately and to reflect on his observations. Pestalozzi makes this sort of occupation the basis of all instruction. If we apply it to common every-day science, what a world of satisfaction it may lead to! Science, though it may bring our people *in* little direct bread and butter, can still save them much indirectly, which is the same thing, since the blind especially must thrive through the practice of thrift and can get ahead only as they know how,—that is, apply the teachings of science. Science may be no Fairy Godmother, indeed, but she "will richly endow those who love her."

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Your Committee makes no apology for the above effusion on feeding the mind through observation lessons; for, if in this report we shall have clinched nothing more than the determination on the part of many to make the building up of a school museum the agenda of the next year and the enforcement of its use a part of the curriculum, it will have done much—very much.

However, perhaps the best direct contribution to the education of the blind we have for you at this time is a paper on the Teaching of Reading and the provision of materials with which to carry this model plan out. Though written by a teacher in a public school center for blind children, the plan is also that of two companion teachers who have developed it throughout many years. The subject matter in it is grounded under two heads: The theory of teaching reading and the practice of teaching read-

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ing. Under the subhead "Mechanics," the teacher says: "To be a master of his reading tools, a blind child must be able to make immediate association between the tactile perception of a Brailled word and its meaning. Therein lies the whole problem of teaching the actual process of reading. The more wisely a child has used his fingers before the time for reading arrives, the more readily he will distinguish the letters which are been refined by much observation and comparison it will be at his service in the new task of feeling letters and words. The child who has touched many objects aimlessly, might as well not have had them under his hands. Exploring fingers which have been motivated to look for certain parts of flowers, to compare sticks of various lengths, to draw on the kindergarten cushions, to cut and to paste, will respond very eagerly to dot combinations which mean sounds or thoughts. The child who has **let his fingers tell his mind** about ferns, museum objects, etc., in response to stimulating questions will not want to guess at letters or words but will be willing to **let his fingers tell his mind** what these new thoughts are." Under the head "Practice" the pegboard is the first aid introduced and its proper use described; for here it is not until a child has made a letter that he reads it. "The correlation of writing and reading is a good thing." When familiar enough with the pegboard the child is promoted to reading Braille slips, both letter and word, the characters **a, am, an, man**, being the first drilled on. "This method is synthetic in the new motor and associative activity required of the child. The new mental processes are both analytic and synthetic. Selecting words from his vocabulary is analytic, because it means bringing the initial letter of each word into relief. Building words from sounds, by blending them, is also synthetic. A blind child must begin with a letter rather than with a word, because he can recognize only one fingerful at a time. Then he may in-

crease his power until he can recognize common words instantly. The bare textual outline of the lessons I have described so minutely will be found in Monroe's New Primer." Now, this primer is excellent because it introduces one letter at a time and immediately builds common words using it." It also offers "a real teaching method, because it proceeds systematically and wisely from the known to the unknown." According to this plan the entire primer is read from the separate slips; and only when all of it has been mastered in reading and in writing is the child given the book. Of course, "he finds his first book unalloyed pleasure, because it is all familiar to him, although in a new guise."

After finishing Monroe's Primer the class is ready for other primers, and a list of these already available is appended to the paper.

Now, in order to make it possible for any school wishing to try out this plan of teaching reading, your Committee has seen to it, first, that 100 copies of the plan itself are immediately available and, second, that pegboards, the slips and the primer are also at command. To be sure, any half-clever person can make pegboards or devise their equivalent, and so avoid buying them. The plates of the primer, embossed under the scrutiny of the three teachers above indicated, will be sent to Louisville this summer and may be ordered thence for use this fall both as bound in book form and as unbound leaflets, to be cut up or sliced by the reading teacher. Those standing back of this plan have also prepared extension leaflets for the pupils who need more phonic drill than the primer itself offers. Your Committee has also caused the plates for these looseleaf drill slips to be embossed, and they too may be obtained from the American Printing House.

The above plan for teaching reading to little beginners is obviously but one plan. Yet your Committee believes, indeed knows from experience

with it, that it is one which has stood the test of years; and we heartily recommend it for trial in any and all schools for the blind.

Your Committee doubts the wisdom of asking provision at this time for printing or multigraphing the dozen papers which have been submitted to it and which it is using as the basis of the present report. Not every school will wish to try them all out, and perhaps only a few copies of each will be demanded. However, we need to know who will require a plan or plans for actual trial and what he will require and report on. We want to have more model papers contributed and here and now urgently appeal for them. Those of us who desire to have the proposed manual must help it along. Or do you want the members of your Committee to shut themselves up in their closets and, like Germans, evolve the manual from the depth of their consciousness?

Your Committee has not yet felt warranted in preparing and submitting a model course of study, though it has had handed in a very good one for 1920 with a running commentary and explanation. Even the best courses in use today are and should be fluid; and they are destined to be modified within the next few years. Before concluding this report we wish to announce that under the leadership of Dr. Hayes and his little band of helpers we are not only measuring pupil capacity and promise but in a tentative way are studying how to bring the knowledge to greater fruition, "How to study," "How to use your mind" are topics surely as applicable to the blind as to others. So, beginning with the high school we have led picked pupils to pursue these studies and given all the teachers to understand that in this matter they must keep ahead of the pupils. Lectures and drill on it have been provided in at least one school, and thence the results of the study will be issued for the benefit of all.

Thrift is the watchword. How to do the most with what you have; how

to utilize your strength, time and material; how to make the textbook go Louisville school quotas most wisely. For example, does every pupil studying history require a whole textbook to himself? or is there not absolute advantage in pursuing this and possibly other subjects by the topical method, keeping accessible in the classroom a few copies only of several texts? This is a timely question, for all of us now that embossed books cost so much; and its answer is further helpful in teaching the blind independence in study. Again, while the finger route to knowledge should doubtless be made the main reliance at school, there is another, the ear route,—which will always and inevitably remain the chief one after graduation. Hence, it should be one of the avenues traveled at school. We mean that some subject in which no textbook has been embossed should be presented by lecture and the pupils taught to listen attentively, in order to learn how to take in information through the ear only, to depend and rely upon themselves and their notes, and so fit themselves for such further study as some will surely wish to pursue after school days. These suggestions lie all in the line of thrift cultivation—a matter which holds in its grasp a better use of what our pupils have and so greater achievement and happiness both at school and in that vastly larger school, the world.

A list of papers already submitted to your Committee follows:

The Application of Public School Music to Classes in Schools for the Blind.

A Year's Course in Domestic Science.

Physical Training.

A Complete Course in Daily Arithmetic.

What to Stress Most in Arithmetic. Geometry.

Latin as a Practical Subject.

Teaching English in the Grades.

Teaching Literature to the Blind.

farther, — that is, how to expand our

Object Study and Geography.

The Teaching of Reading to Little
Beginners of Braille.

A Plan of a School Course with
Running Commentary.

Fellow instructors, we get what we deserve to get. If, therefore, you want the teachers' manual soon and general, you will lend a hand; if late and sectional, you will let George do it. But remember, if you let George

do it, it will be his and not yours, when a great part of its appeal to you will be lost. With this report your Committee again sends out its call, not so much for help as for mutuality of effort. What we all need is a book we shall all use, and this is one in which each and every school shall feel itself to be a contributor and part proprietor. Is it to be a going concern? And are you going to belong?

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